

A
LECTURE,

AND

37

SERMON:

PREACHED AT BELFAST,

BY

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7K

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A LECTURE, &c.

ACTS XXIII. 12—16, "And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded
"together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying, that they
"would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they
"were more than forty who had made this conspiracy. And they came
"to the chief priests and elders, and said—We have bound ourselves
"under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain
"Paul. Now, therefore, ye with the council, signify to the chief
"captain, that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though
"you would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and
"we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's
"sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the
"castle and told Paul."

THOUGH it is most pleasant to preach the doctrines
of the gospel, yet it is also sometimes necessary to inculcate
the duties of religion and morality founded upon gospel
principles, and to give fair warning against horrid sins,
which are equally contrary to the light of Revelation, and
the law of Nature. For the faithful preacher of the gos-
pel must not "shun to declare the whole counsel of God." There is also a passage in one of the Prophets which should
make a deep impression on our minds. The Lord admon-
ishing Ezekiel, says, "When I say unto the wicked,
"O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not
"speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked
"man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require
"at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked
"of his way to turn from it: if he do not turn from his
"way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered

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thy

“ thy soul.” * Let me, therefore, beg your attention to the fore-cited verses, in which we have an account of one of the blackest crimes that ever disgraced human nature. And though all, who have not yet extinguished in their hearts the feelings of *men* and of *christians*, must read, with horror and indignation, a narrative of a conspiracy to murder; yet it may be useful to meditate on the *exceeding sinfulness of sin*, that through grace, you may be guarded against “ the hour and the power of temptation.” Let us then proceed to consider that conspiracy against Paul, of which we have an account in the following verses, beginning with

Verse 12. “ And when it was day certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying, that they would neither eat nor drink ’till they had killed Paul.”

To explain this verse, it may be necessary to consider the occasion of the conspiracy, the conspirators, and the solemn engagement that they came under to commit a dreadful crime.

The occasion of this conspiracy may be learned from some preceding parts of the history of Paul. In chap. xxi. verse 26, we find Paul in the Jewish temple, complying with some of the rites of the ceremonial law, to shew that he was not a contemner of Moses. Whereupon being observed by some of the Jews from Asia, they bring a false accusation against him, that he had defiled the temple by introducing Gentiles into it, contrary to the law. The passions of the ignorant and bigoted multitude being inflamed by this falsehood, they raised a horrid tumult, seized upon Paul, and were going to kill him, had they not been prevented by the timely interference of the chief captain Lyfias and the Roman soldiers. In chap. xxii. the Apostle makes a noble defence of himself, in which he gives

* Ezekiel xxxiii. 8, 9.

gives an account of his bigotry before conversion, of the happy change produced by divine grace, and of his being sent to preach to the Gentiles. The passions of the multitude being again inflamed at hearing of the privileges granted to the Gentiles, the tumult is renewed, and they cry, "away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live." In this chapter, which contains the verses presently under consideration, we find Paul pleading his cause before the Jewish Sanhedrim; rebuking the high Priest who had ordered him to be smitten contrary to law; and taking advantage from the known divisions between the Scribes and Pharisees, to withdraw himself from their furious and unjust persecution. In verse 11, we are informed, that, "the night following" the appearance of Paul before the Sanhedrim, "the Lord stood by him and said, be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." This promise secured the apostle against the imminent danger that threatened him; for it follows in the verse which we now proceed to consider,

"And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together." As soon as the day dawned, which succeeded that, in which Paul had appeared before the Sanhedrim, some of the Jews met together, and formed a vile and treacherous conspiracy to murder him. His enemies tired of waiting upon legal forms, and, perhaps, thinking that the Roman captain was too favourable to him, contrived a more expeditious way of cutting short his life.

We may next take notice of the conspirators. They were *certain of the Jews*. They were some of the Jews, who were inspired with bigotry, or false zeal, and actuated by the same intolerant spirit, which appeared in those, who had all along opposed the ministry of Paul,

who had frequently raised up tumults against him in different cities which he had visited, who had lately threatened to take away his life, and, in a word, who scrupled not to use *any means*, whether good or bad, for the execution of their purposes. Some desperate ruffians of this sort entered into a vile and treacherous conspiracy against the life of this eminently good and holy man; thus shewing, in their hatred to his person, their implacable enmity to the cause of Christ, which he maintained.

Let us now take notice of the solemn engagement, that they came under to commit a horrid crime. “ They bound themselves under a curse, saying, that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.” To make them the more resolute in the execution of their wicked purpose, whatever might be the hazard, they bound themselves by an oath, imprecating the divine wrath upon themselves, if they should eat one morsel of bread, or drink one drop of any liquor whatsoever, till they had assassinated Paul. And this conspiracy was, in some degree, a strong one; for it is added

Verse 3. “ And they were more than forty who had made this conspiracy.”

Paraphrase. So deep was the plot laid, and so general was the blood-thirsty disposition of the Jewish zealots, that more than forty abandoned wretches were found so destitute of justice, mercy, humanity, and the light of nature, as to join together in this vile combination to dispatch, without law, a righteous person, who had never done them the smallest injury. And that they might secure the execution of their design, it follows in

Verse 14. “ And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, we have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.”

Paraphrase.

Paraphrase. They communicated their execrable design to some of the chief priests and elders, men whom they knew to be the most furious and implacable enemies to christianity, and men who, disregarding their high character and sacred profession, would not hesitate to adopt any measures, however flagitious, for suppressing a religion which they hated: to men of this stamp the conspirators revealed their horrid purpose, saying, We have bound ourselves by the severest curse upon soul and body for ever, that we will taste neither food nor drink, till we have embued our hands in the blood of this pestilent fellow Paul, who, however much he has been favoured by the chief captain, seems to us unworthy to live.— We have next their contrivance for the execution of their bloody design in

Verse 15. “ Now therefore ye, with the council, signify to the chief captain, that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.”

Paraphrase. Now, therefore, we beg that ye would keep our counsel, and, as if ignorant of our intentions, you may persuade the rest of the Sanhedrim to concur with you in a request to the chief captain, that he would once more order Paul to appear before you to-morrow: and you may assign as a reason for your request, that you want to hear what he has to say in answer to some further evidence that had appeared against him, and to enquire more exactly into his case, which had been prevented by yesterday's tumult. And if there be any guilt in shedding the blood of such a man, we are willing to take the whole burden of it upon ourselves; for, whatever may be the consequence, we are resolved to dispatch him in his way from the castle, before he can reach the room where the Sanhedrim sits. We have next the discovery of the conspiracy in

Verse

Verse 16. "And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle and told Paul."

Paraphrase. As the Lord is perfectly acquainted with the most hidden counsels of men, and easily brings them to light; and "as the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them, whose heart is perfect towards him*," so, by some means or other, the barbarous plot came to the knowledge of a young man, who was Paul's near relation; and as soon as he heard of their lying in wait to destroy him, he, listening to the dictates of religion and natural affection, went with all speed to the prison, and getting access to Paul, revealed to him the whole conspiracy. And thus, by his laudable honesty, he happily prevented the untimely death of a minister of Jesus Christ, perhaps the most useful, and the most holy, that ever appeared in our world.

Nothing more need be said in explanation of verses so plain; but from this part of sacred history the following observations may be deduced.

Obs. 1st. *Bigotry and false zeal are often productive of dismal effects.* The Jews who conspired against Paul pretended a zeal for religion; but it was an unhallowed zeal, which led them to commit great wickedness, that kind of zeal which flows from bigotry. By bigotry I understand an obstinate attachment to religious opinions, without having any just ground for them from scripture or reason. This is always accompanied with a blind and furious zeal. Such a zeal does Paul ascribe to the Jews, "I bear them record," says he, "that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge†;" and to himself while in an unregenerate state, "concerning zeal persecuting the church§." Bigotry, when accompanied with this
furious

* 2 Chron. xvi. 9. † Rom. x. 2, 11. § Philip. iii. 6.

zeal, always produces the most lamentable effects; some of these effects I shall proceed to mention. The first effect is a mind shut against the light of truth; for when men have embraced opinions, without sufficient evidence, it commonly happens, that they are unwilling to receive light which might disturb them in the quiet possession of these opinions. And it is said, that “the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*.” Another effect of bigotry, is hardness of heart and cruelty against opposers. How cruel was Paul before his conversion, and while he was actuated by the pharisaical temper and spirit! We cannot paint his character, while in this state, in blacker colours, than he has done himself. Speaking of his being put into the ministry, he adds, “Who was before a blasphemer, and persecutor, and injurious†.” And the sacred historian, speaking of him immediately before his conversion, describes him as “yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord‡.” In a word, the final effects of bigotry are acts of injustice and murders. This is a truth, clearly demonstrated by the cruel persecutions which have taken place in the church in all ages. How many have been deprived of all their possessions, and been obliged to meet death in its most horrid forms; because they could not think, as their oppressors did, concerning the matters of religion, which were intimately connected with their own eternal happiness! This is not like true zeal for God and his cause; for true zeal, like the wisdom which is from above, “is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy§.” It weeps over the obstinacy of the wicked, and does all that it can to promote their salvation; but it does not call for fire

* 2 Cor. iv. 4. † 1 Tim. i. 13. ‡ Acts ix. 1. § James iii. 17.

fire from Heaven to destroy opposers, nor does it assume the place of God by executing vengeance on unbelieving and impenitent sinners.

Obs. 2. *It is very sinful, upon any pretext whatever, to form a conspiracy to murder any person.* Surely it was sinful to form a conspiracy to murder Paul, though the Jews pretended a zeal for religion. Paul was a holy, good and benevolent man. But though he had been a persecutor, as he once was, it would still have been unlawful to form a conspiracy to put him to death. For the christian religion teaches us, "to love our enemies," "to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them who despitefully use us, and persecute us." It does not teach us to murder persecutors, but to pray for them, and wait for their conversion. There are only three cases in which a person can be justly put to death; to wit, in case of legal condemnation, after a fair and just trial; in case of necessary self-defence, when there seems to be no possibility of avoiding death, but by resisting the violent and unjust attacks of a foe, or lastly, in case of a just war. All other pretexts for killing a person are unjust. This leads me to observe, that,

Obs. 3. *An engagement by oath to commit a horrid crime can never be lawful or binding.* Such was the engagement which the Jews came under to kill Paul. As the moral law is superior to every other law; so no obligation which we may come under, can render it lawful to violate that law. What! Can any man believe, that any human engagement can make null and void the law of God? At this rate, man might be superior to, and give laws to his Creator; and to render *any thing* lawful, it would only be necessary to *swear* to do it; which is horrid blasphemy. The truth is, that an oath does not constitute any new duty; for if it be a lawful one, it only binds us, in a more solemn manner, to perform a duty, which we
are

are already bound to perform by the law of God. To swear, then, to commit a crime, is only a high aggravation of the sin, which one is guilty of, in conceiving such a horrid resolution in the heart. And the person who thus swears and performs according to his oath, doubly sins. He sins in taking the oath, and also sins in performing it. Of consequence, if he does not see the evil of such an oath, and repent of it, he binds his own soul under the curse, whether he performs or does not perform his engagement. If he performs his engagement, he transgresses the divine law, as the Jews would have done if they had killed Paul. If he does not perform his engagement, according to his own opinion, he hath profaned the divine Name by perjury. There is no way of escaping from this double bond, but by a sincere return to the Lord by true repentance, and an utter renunciation of such horrid engagements. But they are most happy who never enter into such obligations. This leads me to observe, that

Obf. 4. *It is surprising how many will join in the execution of a wicked purpose.* To murder such a person as Paul was after his conversion; to destroy one, who, like his divine Master, was breathing nothing but good will, loving kindness, and the tenderest compassion for the human race; to hurry out of the world one, who was unwearied in doing good, seemed to be a purpose *so* diabolical, *so* contrary to the first principles of law and justice, as well as to the finer feelings of humanity, that one would have thought, that few would have conceived, and still fewer would have engaged in the execution of so horrid a design. But who can fathom the depth of wickedness, that may be in a human heart? In a short time above forty persons, of similar tempers and feelings, and actuated by the same zeal, were eager and forward to enter into a horrid conspiracy against the life of an innocent man.

Had they waited a little while longer, they might perhaps have found as many more to engage in the same design. But what could they alledge in excuse for such wickedness and cruelty? Why? they might say, that Paul once was a Pharisee; that he was once as furious a zealot in their cause as any of them; and that he had *changed sides, deserted their party*, and become a firm friend and zealous promoter of that religion which he had formerly persecuted. But was this a sufficient reason, that so many should conspire against his life? Would it not have been better to have heard his reasons for such an important change from superstition to true religion, and from cruelty to meekness and loving kindness? Ah! blind zeal! thou art the fury which transforms so many men to blood-thirsty monsters, and steels their hearts against the feelings of humanity! Nor are the wise and the learned always exempted from thy influence; for it may next be observed, that

Obs. 5. *Cruel and bloody men know those that are of the same disposition with themselves.* The conspirators revealed their design to the high priests and elders. They well knew, that notwithstanding their high and sacred characters, they were men who thirsted for blood, and so would not scruple to favour any design, however infamous, that might serve to promote the interest of their party.--- What Christian? what man of feeling would choose to be thus distinguished by assassins, as a man of *their sort*, and honoured, or rather dishonoured, by *their confidence*? Methinks I hear the good, the generous, the benevolent, and the humane man say, may my ears ever be shut against such secrets, and may my heart be always shocked at the mere idea of such horrid crimes! This leads me to another observation, which is

Obs. 6. *It is sinful to associate with the wicked in the forming of their plots, or to keep their secrets.* It is dangerous for any person to come under a solemn obligation

tion to keep the secrets of any one, without limitation or discrimination : For, alas ! we have not to deal with Angels in this world, who cannot sin, or may not reveal to us things that are sinful. And we may sin against God, in a grievous manner, by making ourselves the repositories of wicked secrets. I do not here argue against that confidence, which we may repose in our neighbour, or which our neighbour may repose in us, when he consults us about matter of sin or duty ; for by means of such confidence, we may be useful in hindering ourselves or others from entering upon wicked designs. But what I disapprove of, is an unlimited promise to keep the secrets of men, without knowing in what plots they may be engaged. Such seems to have been the promise given by the chief priests and elders to the conspirators against Paul, when they agreed to petition the chief captain to bring down Paul to the council, though they well knew that bloody men lay in wait to kill him, see verse 20th. They did not, indeed, choose to commit the crime themselves ; but they were very well pleased that others should do it ; and they seemed, by favouring their design, to bid them good speed. The language of their conduct was “ it is doing God good service to take such a man off the face of the earth ; tho’ we would not chuse to be seen in this affair.” Ah ! how horrid is it, that men should, in this manner, become sharers in the crimes of others ! My soul enter not thou into their secret !

Obf. 7. *There is no plot so deeply laid, but the Lord is privy to it ; and can easily discover it.* He is the Governor of the world, who orders and regulates every thing relating to the peace, good order, and preservation of human society. He is the Omniscient Judge, who perfectly knows every thing that is done in the world, even in the most secret chambers ; and he has a particular regard for the preservation of the righteous. “ For the eyes of the

“ Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to
 “ shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose
 “ heart is perfect towards him !” Hence he often brings
 to light the hidden plots of men, especially when they
 happen to be against the righteous. If this were not done,
 if men should be allowed without interruption, to con-
 trive, in secret, the destruction of their neighbours, there
 would soon be an end of mutual confidence ; the bands of
 human society would be loosed ; every man would become
 his own judge and avenger ; there would be no law, but
 the law of the strongest ; and the whole world, in process
 of time, might run into the wildest anarchy and confu-
 sion. But blessed be that wise Governor, who brings to
 light the hidden things of darkness, preserves his own
 people from every danger, and maintains a moral govern-
 ment in the world ! Thus *He* discovered the conspiracy
 against Paul.

Obf. 8. *It is the duty of all who know of any secret
 design against the life of their neighbour to inform him of
 his danger.* Paul's sister's son acted a benevolent and just
 part to Paul. That his name might be transmitted with
 honour to posterity, his relation to that apostle is particu-
 larly mentioned. Should not all who know of such wick-
 ed designs against the life of a friend and neighbour warn
 him of his danger ? Does not the sixth commandment re-
 quire us to use every lawful endeavour to preserve our own
 lives and the lives of others ? Is it not our duty to do unto
 others, as we would have them do unto us ? What re-
 flections of a dreadful kind must occur to a feeling man,
 if he can recollect that he might have saved the life of
 some valuable member of society, and had neglected to do
 it ? Is not this a species of murder ? Let us therefore re-
 member the command to love our neighbour as ourselves.

A SERMON, &c.

2 COR. V. 11---“ *Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*”

IN the verse immediately preceding our text, the apostle looks forward to that awful day, when all the millions of men, who from the beginning to the end of time have appeared on the face of the earth, shall stand before the tribunal of Christ. His words ought to make a deep impression on our minds. “We must all appear,” says he, “before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” While he thought on the certainty of such a solemn appearance before the tribunal of Christ; he improves the consideration of it, to excite us to repentance. “Knowing the terror of the Lord,” says he, “we persuade men.” He knew that a day of judgment had been fixed from all eternity; that that awful day was continually approaching; and that, whenever it should come, it would be a day of terror to the wicked and hypocrites. His heart was moved with the most generous compassion for sinners who were ready to perish: and therefore he used every awakening or alluring argument, which, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, might be effectual to persuade men to believe

believe in Christ, to turn from their sins, and to study a thorough reform in heart, life, and conversation. And he did all this in such a manner, and with so much sincerity of heart, as to be able to make the following appeal to God and his hearers. "We are made manifest to God," viz. as a faithful servant, "and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences." How happy would it be for other ministers, if they could with humility, with truth, and with an approving conscience, make such an appeal. In order that we may in some measure, discharge our duty, in the consideration of the text, we shall, as the Lord enables us,

I. Speak of a true knowledge of the terror of the Lord.

II. Speak of the duty of persuading men.

III. Mention some of the motives wherewith we should endeavour to persuade men to repent.

I. To speak of a true knowledge of the terror of the Lord.

1st. This knowledge of the terror of the Lord implies a full conviction, that the day of judgment will be an inexpressibly dreadful day to hypocrites, unbelievers, and all impenitent persons. This conviction is founded on the plain declarations of scripture, and on the nature or reason of things.

First, our conviction that the day of judgment will be a day of terror to the wicked may be founded on the plain declarations of scripture, some of which we may now consider with a serious attention. The Psalmist tells us that "God is angry with the wicked every day: if he turn not he will whet his sword: he hath bent his bow and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this

“ this shall be the portion of their cup. For in the hand
 “ of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red: it is
 “ full of mixture, and he poureth out of the same: but
 “ the dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall
 “ wring out and drink*.” The hypocrite, though he
 may deceive men, will not be able to deceive the Searcher
 of hearts, or escape his just judgment: “ The hypocrite’s
 “ hope shall perish. For what is the hope of the hypo-
 “ crite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away
 “ his soul? The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness
 “ hath surprised the hypocrites: who among us shall
 “ dwell with devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell
 “ with everlasting burnings? The hypocrites in heart
 “ heap up wrath†.” The unbeliever is joined in the same
 punishment. For he that believeth not is condemned
 already, “ and, if he continue in unbelief, the wrath of
 “ God abideth on him‡.” In a word, “ The wrath of
 “ God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness,
 “ and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in un-
 “ righteousness§.”

It is no less plain from scripture, that God hath appointed
 a dreadful day for awarding to the wicked the just pu-
 nishment of their sins. Hence the apostle addressing the
 wicked man, says, “ After thy hardness and impenitent
 “ heart, thou treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the
 “ day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment
 “ of God||.” In that dreadful day, the Lord, the right-
 eous Judge, will say unto them on the left hand, “ de-
 “ part from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared
 “ for the devil and his angels.” This sentence will be
 immediately executed. There can be no arrest of judg-
 ment in this case, “ for these shall go away into everlast-
 “ ing punishment. Those who know not God, and obey
 “ not

* Psalm vii. 17, 12, 13.—Ps. xi. 6.—Ps. lxxv. 8. † Job viii. 18,
 and xxvii. 8.—Isaiah xxxiii. 14, and Job xxxvi. 13. ‡ John iii. 1,
 36. § Rom. i. 18. || Rom. ii. 5.

“ not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, ---- shall be
 “ punished with everlasting destruction from the presence
 “ of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ;” on that
 day, “ when he shall come to be glorified in his saints,
 “ and to be admired in all them that believe.” This
 awful day was represented in a vision to John the divine---
 “ I saw,” says he, “ the dead small and great stand before
 “ God : and the books were opened : and another book
 “ was opened, which is the book of life :---and whosoever
 “ was not found written in the book of life, was cast into
 “ the fire.” In the last place, the apostle puts it beyond
 all doubt that such an awful day may be expected. “ For
 “ we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,
 “ that every one may receive the things done in his body,
 “ according to that he hath done, whether it be good or
 “ bad†.” If then the righteous shall receive a *gracious*
 reward, the wicked may expect a *just* punishment, ac-
 cording to the demerit of their deeds.

As it is plain from scripture, that there is a day coming
 which will be terrible beyond description to the wicked
 and impenitent ; so the same truth is no less evident from
 the nature or reason of things. We know for certain that
 the Judge of all the earth must do right. He must ren-
 der to every one according to his deeds. He cannot ren-
 der to the righteous according to the work of the wicked ;
 nor to the wicked, according to the work of the righteous.
 This would be contrary to the notions which we have
 of distributive justice among men ; how much more would
 it be contrary to the justice of the Supreme Judge. There-
 fore we must conclude, that the wicked must be punished,
 either in this world, or in that which is to come.

But we often see men, even while they are going on in
 the most wicked courses, enjoy prosperity in this world.

Their

† Mat. xxv. 41, 46.—2 Thes. i. 9, 10.—Rev. xx. 12, 15.—2 Cor.
 v. 10.

Their pastures are clothed with flocks; their fields are covered with waving crops; their granaries are stored with corn, and their cellars with wine; their coffers are filled with gold and silver; they are raised sometimes to the highest pinnacle of worldly honours; and, in a word, they swim in affluence, and enjoy a constant round of pleasures. What was observed concerning them in Asaph's time may be affirmed concerning them still; "There are
 " no bands in their death; but their strength is firm.
 " They are not in trouble as other men: neither are they
 " plagued as other men. Therefore pride compasseth
 " them as a chain, violence covereth them as a garment.
 " Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than
 " heart could wish*." On the other hand the people of God are often exposed to poverty, contempt, reproach, and various other hardships of human life; so that waters of a full cup of affliction seem to be wrung out to them.

Now if wicked men should triumph in this world and pass unpunished in the next, where would be the justice and holiness of God the Governor of the Universe, and where would be the advantages of true religion? We must conclude, then, that a dreadful day of retribution comes, which will be terrible to God's enemies. When we understand their end, we may say, "Surely thou didst set
 " them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into
 " destruction. How are they brought into desolation as
 " in a moment? they are utterly consumed with terrors†." The Lord punishes *some* of the wicked in this world, to shew that there is a God to judge in the earth. But *all* are not punished, to shew that there is a judgment to come---and this will be a dreadful day of reckoning to all the finally impenitent: Scripture and reason join to convince us of this truth, that the treasure of wrath, which they have been heaping up for many years, shall then be paid them in its full amount.

D

2. This

* Psalm lxxiii.

† Jer. ii. 19.—Pro. v. 22.

2. This knowledge of the terror of the Lord implies an experimental knowledge of the evil of sin, and of the tremendous wrath due to it. The Lord sometimes gives men a taste of the bitter fruits of sin even in this world. By means of affliction, or the convictions of sin in the conscience, he says to the sinner, "thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." He hath said "his own iniquities shall take the wicked man himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins." The Lord saith, "because they have forsaken my law,—behold I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink*." The sorrows flowing from a sense of sin in this world are often so great, that they resemble the torments of hell. Hence the Psalmist says "the sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow†." These sorrows are to the finally impenitent a foretaste, an earnest, and a dreadful demonstration of the torments of hell. The penitent, indeed, are happily delivered from these sorrows, restored to peace of conscience, and freed from eternal condemnation, through faith in Christ the Saviour. But they still remember the affliction and misery, the wormwood and the gall of a Christless state‡. They have felt the horrors of conscience flowing from a sense of guilt; they have seen the sword of justice brandished over their guilty heads and ready to strike the fatal blow; they have heard the law thundering out its curses against them; they have seen the avenger of blood pursuing, and ready to overtake them; they have had a prospect of a future state, and have seen the day of the Lord's coming to judgment to be "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day

* Jer. ix. 13, 15.

† Psalm cxvi. 3.

‡ Lam. iii. 19.

“ day of clouds and of thick darkness,” --- “ a great and
 “ very terrible day, which no impenitent man can abide*,”
 in a word, they have perhaps been thrown into a bed of
 sickness, which brought them to the confines of an eternal
 state, and they have looked down from the brink of the
 fearful precipice into the boundless ocean of misery, into
 which they were about to be plunged. The Lord indeed
 hath brought them back, granted them a free pardon, and
 delivered them from the dominion of sin and its evil conse-
 quences. But their souls are still humbled within them,
 when they recollect the misery of their former unregenerate
 state; and so they may be said to have known by experi-
 ence the terror of the Lord. Their experience may be
 useful to others; for I may observe in the next place,
 that

3. This knowledge of the terror of the Lord, in the
 godly, always inspires them with the tenderest compassion
 for perishing sinners. Those who have themselves felt
 the terrors of the Lord, and tasted the bitter fruits of sin,
 behold, with an eye of pity, wretched sinners rushing for-
 ward in the paths that lead to eternal destruction. Fully
 convinced from the word of God, and from their own
 experience, that the end of such courses is death, their
 hearts are grieved at the folly of men, their eyes run down
 with tears, they mourn in secret, and, their bowels of
 mercies being strongly moved with the most generous
 concern for the happiness of men, they do all that they
 can, by advice, and instructions, and expostulations, to
 snatch the miserable from the grasp of the destroyer.

All this will appear from the Scriptures. What a gene-
 rous compassion does the Apostle evince for his brethren
 of the Jewish nation, when he says “ I could wish my-
 “ self were accursed from Christ,” *i. e.* anathematized,
 or laid under the sentence of the higher excommunication,

D 2

“ for

* Joel ii. 2, 11.

“ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*.” This was a tender concern and compassion for his brethren, like that which the Lord Jesus expresses, “ when he came near and beheld the city Jerusalem, and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes†.” Thus Samuel mourned the rejection of Saul. When he had pronounced the sentence of the Lord against this transgressor, the sacred historian informs us, “ that Samuel came no more to Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul‡.” The arms which true zeal uses to convert sinners, are prayers, entreaties, and exhortations; and when all these are rejected; when its efforts are all in vain, it weeps in secret over the pride, obstinacy, and wickedness of the impenitent. The mourning Prophet says, “ O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.” And in another place he says, “ Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains---but if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock is carried away captive§.” When the faithful servants of Christ are of this disposition, they strive with the obstinacy, unbelief and impenitence of sinners, as long as there is any hope of their recovery. The Apostle was certainly actuated by such compassionate feelings, when he said “ knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.” This leads me,

II. To speak of persuading men. And here we may shew 1st, of what we are to persuade men, and 2dly, how we are to persuade them.

First. Of

* Rom. ix. 3. † Luke xix. 41, 42. ‡ 1 Samuel xv. 35.

§ Jer. ix. 1, and xiii. 16, 17.

First. Of what we are to persuade men.

1. We are to convince them, as rational creatures, of the certainty of a future judgment. If men do not believe in a judgment to come, nothing that we can say about the disadvantages of sin, or the pleasures of true godliness, will make the smallest impression on their minds. They would in this case laugh at instruction, and scorn reproof. Therefore as one of the first things that determined sinners endeavour to persuade themselves of, is that there is no judgment to come; so the first step that we must take, to alarm secure sinners, is to convince them, that they must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and that the day of Judgment will be terrible to all the workers of iniquity.

2. We are to convince them of their own guilt and danger. Having shewn them the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, the general doctrine must be applied with particular force to their own souls. They must be convinced of the evil of sin; of the guilt which they have contracted; of the purity, holiness, justice, and faithfulness of God, who necessarily demands a satisfaction, and of the consequent danger of continuing in a sinful state without repentance.

3. We are to persuade them to believe and repent. They must be informed that there is no safety for them out of Christ; that the storm of Divine wrath is continually approaching, and that Christ is the only shelter from the storm. They must also be told that in coming to Christ, they must come to him, as a Saviour from sin, as well as from misery; so that in the very act of believing, there may be a turning from sin with detestation and abhorrence. For
 “ If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old
 “ things are passed away, behold all things are become
 “ new.”*

4. We

* 2 Cor. v. 7.

4. We are to beseech them to receive the message of grace and reconciliation. We must inform them that " God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, " not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath " committed unto us the word of reconciliation." And so we must offer to them Christ and all his salvation freely, saying, " Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as " though God did beseech you by us ; we pray you in " Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God*." We must earnestly entreat them to receive him that they may believe through grace, and live like those who are to be judged by Christ, and who would wish to appear with holy boldness before his awful tribunal, on that important day, when judgment shall be pronounced before assembled worlds. This leads me

Secondly, To shew how we are to persuade men. And,

1st, We are to deal with them as rational creatures, and to persuade them by arguments proper for the purpose. These are the only arms which we are allowed to use. " For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, " but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of " strong holds†." The Apostles were not sent to persuade men to repent, *by the force of arms*, but *by the force of arguments*, and motives fit to work upon their rational natures. The dread of civil pains and penalties may restrain men from such acts of wickedness as are hurtful to civil society ; but it cannot convert men, it cannot change their hearts or natures. But the gospel aims not only at the restraining of men from *sinful acts*, but also at a thorough change of their *inward inclinations*, a change from a love of sin to a love of holiness. This change can only be accomplished by means of rational arguments suited to the purpose. But we must not think that moral suasion *alone* will be sufficient to lead men to repentance. For I proceed to observe that,

2. We

* Cor. v. 19, and 20.

† 2 Cor. x. 4.

2. We must always depend on the Holy Spirit for making our arguments effectual. Though men are rational creatures, who are to be persuaded by means of rational arguments; yet their moral inability, while they are unconverted, is such, that a mere speculative persuasion of the beauty of holiness, or of the evil of sin, will not be of sufficient force to conquer the obstinacy of their hearts, and to turn them from sin unto God. Such arguments, indeed, might be of sufficient force, if human nature were still uncorrupted, and had no wrong bias, and if the Divine power influenced the good habit to draw it forth to exercise. But the state of matters has been greatly changed by the fall. The Scripture informs us, that men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins.* A Prophet says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil†."

Such being the present state of human nature, there is an absolute necessity for a thorough change upon all the faculties of the soul by the renewing grace of God, before it can be persuaded, by the best arguments we can use, to return to God. Scripture and fatal experience prove that all our arguments are ineffectual, if they are not accompanied with the power of the Spirit, enlightening the mind, subduing the obstinate will, and sanctifying the affections. Hence, in Scripture, the call to repentance, is always joined with the promise of grace to enable us to repent, in order to teach us, that we must not depend on moral suasion for success; but ought rather to depend entirely on the Divine blessing, without which, all the powers of persuasion would be quite ineffectual. The Prophet exhorts in this manner; "Cast away from you
" all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed,
" and make you a new heart, and a new spirit, for why
" will ye die, O house of Israel."§. Here is a good
exhortation

* Eph. ii. 1.

† Jer. xiii. 23.

§ Ezek. xviii. 31.

exhortation enforced by a powerful argument. But all this would be ineffectual, if we could not join to the exhortation the following gracious promise: “a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh*.” Viewing this promise, whenever we are called to repentance, we may turn our waiting eyes towards God, and use this prayer, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me†.” If ever we turn to God, we must be made willing to come; and it is written, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power‡.” We can do nothing without the continual influence of Divine power. “For it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure§.” But God, in thus inclining us to turn from sin to holiness, still deals with us as rational creatures, and works upon us effectually by means of arguments, and motives suited to our natures, which he blesses and makes effectual by his all-powerful grace. The Lord draws men to himself; but he does it “with the cords of a man, with bands of love||”. What, then, are we to do? We can only declare the arguments or motives to repentance, which we find in the Scriptures; and having thus acted in subserviency to the grand design of God in a preached gospel, we must leave it to himself to accompany his own word with a blessing. With these views I now proceed,

III. To mention some of these motives, wherewith we should endeavour to persuade men to repent. And,

1st. Consider what sin is, of which you are so fond. Is there any thing so beautiful, so desirable, or so advantageous in sin, as to be a sufficient compensation for the loss of the

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

§ Philip. ii. 13.

† Psa. li. 10.

|| Hof. xi. 4.

‡ Psa. cx. 3.

the divine favour? Must not conscience and fatal experience answer—"there is nothing in sin but misery and disappointment?" But if there be any thing desirable in the enjoyment of sin, what is it? Are you pleased with its profits? But, "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Are you charmed with the pleasures of sin? These are delusive at the best; they are often accompanied with pain; at any rate they are but for a season; and, in the end, they are succeeded by everlasting misery. Besides, there is more *real joy* to be found in the favour of God, than in all the pleasures of sin, though they could be enjoyed without interruption, as long as we are in this world. The Psalmist says, "many say, who will shew us *any good*?" But what was *his* prayer? "Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine encreased*."

Let us form a just estimate of what sin is, before we embrace it, to the unspeakable loss of our immortal souls. It presents you with a bait of pleasure; but that bait conceals a hook, which wounds the soul. Sinful pleasures, however attractive they may appear to a deluded mind, resemble serpents which are beautiful to the sight, but armed with a poisonous and deadly sting. "Look not thou upon the wine, when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it, and whosoever breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him†."

Can the soul find any rest or solid satisfaction in the enjoyments of sin? No: This is impossible, "There is

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"no

* Matth. xvi. 26 Job xxvii. 8. Psa. iv. 6. 7. † Prov. xxiii. 31, 32. Eccl. x. 8.

“ no peace, saith my God to the wicked*.” The horrors of conscience, the dread of divine vengeance, and the awful prospect of a future judgment, disturb the tranquillity, and spoil all the pleasures of the impenitent sinner. The immortal soul can find no rest but in the love of a reconciled God.

How insatiable are the lusts of the corrupt heart ! They harraßs the heart of the sinner with constant demands, which can never be satisfied. And so “ the wicked,” agitated with these impetuous lusts, “ are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” What an arduous task is assigned to him, who endeavours to gratify the lusts of his heart ! an Apostle says “ Ye lust and have not : ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain : ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.” The Psalmist says concerning the Israelites “ they tempted God in their hearts, by asking meat for their lust.” How much are they to be pitied, who, acting as the drudges of sin, are continually making provision for vile lusts, which, like the grave and barren womb, never say, it is enough† !

Besides : Is not a sinful course a foolish course ? He who is unfaithful to God is also an enemy to his own interest. Those who pursue after lying vanities forsake their own mercy. They prefer delusive and transitory pleasures to their own temporal and eternal happiness. The merciful Lord is pleased to expostulate with infatuated sinners in this manner, “ Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool†.” But obstinate and foolish sinners
listen

* Isa. lviii. 21. † Isa. lviii. 20. Jas. iv. 2, 3. Psa. lxxviii. 18.

† Isa. i. 18.

listen not to such kind expostulations. They hug a serpent in their bosoms, which is ready to sting them to death, drink a cup of poison which we would dash from their lips, and please themselves with the shadow of happiness, while they are really rushing forward in the path of misery. What folly and madness is this !

Let us add to this, that sin keeps us at a distance from God. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear*." Does not sin, O ye impenitent, poison all your comforts in this life, shake your confidence in God, mar your access to and communion with him, and place an impassable gulph between you and heaven ? Is this your deliberate choice ? Then, if you repent not, you may expect to hear that awful sentence "depart from me ye cursed," For

The end of sin is bitterness and death. Sin, like the whorish woman, says, "stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant : " But, "the man who is deluded by such flattering language, knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of, "hell†."

Behold, O sinners, the true picture of sin, which you embrace with so much eagerness and delight ! I now present you with another consideration.

2. Consider that you must die. It is impossible that you can evade the payment of this debt of nature. "For it is appointed to all men once to die‡." converse in your meditations with death and the grave. Say to corruption "Thou art my father : " to the worm, "thou art my mother and sister." Behold the end of your present life, and the eternal flight of all your enjoyments ! Consider also, that though death is certain, the time of it

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* Isa. lix. 2.

† Prov. ix. 17, 18.

‡ Heb. ix. 27.

is uncertain. We may be in perfect health just now ; and the next moment we may be plunged into eternity. Think on these things, and judge of the necessity of a speedy repentance. Impenitent sinners ! you live in sin, without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world. Would you wish to die in this state ? No ; However you may live, you will certainly be ready to join Balaam in his prayer " Let me die the death of the righteous, and " let my latter end be like his." But remember, that he came to an untimely end ; and so may you, without being allowed, in your last moments, any time for repentance.

What will be your thoughts of sin on a death bed ? With what remorse will you look back on a mispent life, stained with innumerable sins, of which you have never repented ? and with what horror will you look forward to a justly incensed Judge and his awful tribunal ? The Lord says to every impenitent sinner " Can thine heart " endure, or can thine hands be strong in the days that I " shall deal with thee*." Think on these things now, while time and space are yet given for repentance.

How dreadful will it be to die impenitent, to lie down in the grave with your bones full of the sin of your youth, and to go into the immediate presence of your Judge with a load of unpardoned guilt upon the conscience. O that sinners would think of these things before it be too late !

Infatuated men ! why are you so fond of the profits and the pleasures of sin ? You *must* part with them all at death. They cannot follow you into the grave. You *must*, whether you will or not, leave them all behind you. Why will you not part with them *now*, before they be torn from you, and leave you nothing but sorrow, remorse, disappointment, bitter anguish, and endless despair ?

In

* Ezek. xxii. 14.

In a word, consider that there will be no room for repentance in the grave. As death leaves us judgment will find us. "Therefore, whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest*." I proceed to another consideration.

3. Consider the certainty of a judgment to come. "For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." We *must* appear. There can be no possibility of escaping from the just Judgment of God. As the wealth of worlds could not bribe the Judge; so the combined powers of all creatures could not rescue from the hands of his justice. We must *all* appear; the greatest, as well as the least; the highest as well as the lowest of all the children of men, shall be equally obliged to obey the summons which awakes the dead. We must *appear* in the very same state, in which we fall into the grave, either deformed with sin and guilt, or pardoned, justified, and sanctified. We must appear *before the Judgment Seat of Christ*, who is God in our nature, who is now our Saviour, and will then be our Judge, and who will then be as awfully severe to his enemies, who by their impenitence have despised his grace, as he will be gloriously amiable to his friends, who, through faith, have obeyed his gospel. We must appear "that every one" being exactly scrutinized by the all-seeing Judge, "may receive" the fruits or consequences of "the things done," spoken or thought of, while the soul remained in his "mortal body, according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad;" that is, according as his actions and governing principles shall evince

* Ezck. ix. 10.

evince, that he is either wicked, impenitent, and unbelieving, or else a true believer in Christ, or who has been purified from sin. In the one case he shall receive the *just punishment* of his sins : In the other a *gracious reward*.

This is the doctrine of a future judgment, and what a strong argument does it afford us for pressing the duty of immediate repentance. The Apostle Paul uses it to this purpose in Acts 17. 30, 31. Now sinners, consider that the longer ye continue impenitent, the more will your debt to Divine Justice be swelled, and fearful, at length, will be the reckoning : that your sins which lie down with you in the dust, ~~will~~ ^{shall} rise up against you in judgment : that if you continue impenitent, you will be exposed to shame before millions of men and Angels, while you, in vain call upon the hills to fall upon you, and cover you from the face of the Judge ; and that according to your deeds your eternal state shall be fixed. In the last place

4. You must repent or perish. Sinners are ruined for want of consideration. " I hearkened and heard," says Jehovah, " but they spake not aright : no man repented " him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ? " every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." But whether sinners will consider or not, their ruin is certain if they continue impenitent. For a dreadful day comes, " when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming " fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, " and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ : " who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from " the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his " power."

All the pleas of the sinner for an arrest of judgment will avail him nothing. Will he plead the general mercy of God ?

God ? But that mercy he hath despised. If he will have mercy let him seek it in God's way by trusting on Christ's atonement, and by true repentance. See *Isaiah* *lv.* 7. Will he depend on the blood of Christ for deliverance ? That blood was shed to save us *from* our sins. But not one drop of it was shed to procure impunity to the obstinate sinner, continuing *in* his sins to the end of his course. Therefore we can have no actual interest in the death of Christ, except we receive the grace of repentance.

Let the sinner dismiss these false hopes, and reflect that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ; that the pleasures of sin are but for a season, while the punishment is eternal ; that the last pulse will beat and the last groan be uttered ; that the soul, separated from the body, will enter upon an eternal state ; and that if it be impenitent, it will be deprived of all pleasure, and exposed to horror, remorse, and misery, through the ages of eternity. But if it believes and repents, it shall enjoy life everlasting.

F I N I S.



STAMP

To
The Proprietors of
The Anti-Jacobin Review Magazine

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Fleet Street

London

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